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SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN CHURCHES BOMBED IN TRIPOLI

¶1. (U) THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL ATTACKS AGAINST CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS IN TRIPOLI DURING THE PERIOD JANUARY 8-9. TWO CHURCHES, MARONITE AND GREEK ORTHODOX, WERE BOMBED ON TUESDAY, CAUSING SERIOUS DAMAGE, WHILE ANOTHER GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH AND AN EVANGELICAL INSTITUTION WERE DAMAGED IN ATTACKS WEDNESDAY. A CHRISTIAN CEMETARY WAS ALSO BOMBED WEDNESDAY NIGHT.

¶2. (U) ISLAMIC UNIFICATION MOVEMENT (TAWHIID) HAS ISSUED TWO CONSECUTIVE CONDEMNATIONS OF THE ATTACKS, NOTING THAT TRIPOLI HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN AN EXAMPLE OF RELIGIOUS UNITY, AND DEPLORING EFFORTS "TO FRIGHTEN THE CHRISTIANS OUT OF THE CITY." WEEKLY MEETING OF ISLAMIC DAR AL-FATWA WEDNESDAY ALSO CONDEMNED THE BOMBINGS, AS DID BRIG. OTHMAN OTHMAN, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES DURING A VISIT TO TRIPOLI WEDNESDAY.

¶3. (C) CHRISTIAN NOTABLE AND LEBANESE FORCES CHARTER MEMBER, CHARLES MALIK, TOLD POLOFF THAT FOUR CHRISTIANS HAVE, AS WELL, BEEN MURDERED ON ROADS NEAR TRIPOLI, AND THAT CHRISTIAN RESIDENTS OF AREA FEAR FOR THEIR LIVES. HE SAID THAT "LEBANESE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY" IS THINKING OF PREPARING A DEMARCHE TO STATE DEPARTMENT ON TRIPOLI VIOLENCE.

¶4. COMMENT (C): AS ALWAYS IN BEIRUT, LIST OF POSSIBLE PERPETRATORS OF THESE ATTACKS IS A LONG ONE, BEGINNING WITH TAWHIID ITSELF. MANY OBSERVERS ATTRIBUTE BOMBINGS, WHICH COME SOON AFTER RECENT DEPLOYMENT OF LAF INTO TRIPOLI AS PART OF NORTHERN SECURITY PLAN, AS EFFORT TO EMBARASS GOL (WHILE AT SAME TIME INTIMIDATING CHRISTIANS). ELABORATING ON THIS HYPOTHESIS, CHRISTIAN LEBANESE EMBASSY EMPLOYEE FROM KOURA REGION HAS TOLD US THAT MUCH BLAME IS BEING LAID AT FEET OF STILL-ACTIVE COMMUNISTS IN TRIPOLI, WITH RATIONALE BEING THAT LATTER ARE TRYING TO DISRUPT SECURITY PLAN THERE AND PLACE THE BLAME ON TAWHIID "PRINCE" SHA'BAN, WHO RECENTLY BOASTED IN A PUBLIC SPEECH THAT THE COMMUNISTS HAD BEEN CRUSHED IN TRIPOLI. A SIMILAR ARGUMENT, HOWEVER, COULD BE MADE THAT TAWHIID'S MAIN RIVAL IN TRIPOLI, THE ARAB DEMOCRATIC PARTY, IS BEHIND BOMBINGS.

BARTHOLOMEW